

CONSOLIDATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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March 12, 1996

The Honorable Jane Hague
King County Council Chair
1200 King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

The Honorable Cynthia Sullivan
Chair, Regional Policy Committee
King County Council
1200 King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: King County Regional Policy Committee--Second Year Performance Review

Dear Ms. Hague and Ms. Sullivan:

As part of its mission to advise the King County Executive and the Metropolitan King County Council on implementation of the King County and Metro consolidation, the King County Consolidation Advisory Committee (CAC), through its Regional Government Subcommittee, undertook the task of assessing the performance of the Regional Policy Committee. The enclosed report is the result of that work.

Of the three new regional committees that were created as part of the consolidation, the CAC decided to focus on the Regional Policy Committee for two reasons. First, the Regional Transportation and the Regional Water Quality Committees appear to have managed a relatively smooth transition from the former Metro Council to the new consolidated government. Whatever problems they have had or will have, these committees appear to be able to reach mutually agreeable resolutions. Second, the Regional Policy Committee is an untested approach to managing regional government issues. That fact alone would be cause for closer scrutiny. However, the RPC's relatively broad mission statement combined with the struggle of 1) a County government to grapple with an expanded regional focus and 2) of cities seeking to have a meaningful voice in the regional issue agenda has lead, not unexpectedly, to a sometimes difficult beginning. Yet, progress has been made and the CAC is confident that the RPC can successfully achieve its potential as an essential element of a high performance regional government. While this report is addressed to the Metropolitan King County Council and the RPC members, it is important that the elected officials of all the jurisdictions in King County recognize that they equally share responsibility for the ultimate success or failure of the RPC.

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The CAC appreciates the on-going interest of the RPC in the CAC's work and the sincere interest by many RPC members in seeking ways to improve the RPC's performance. The CAC's Regional Government Subcommittee observed RPC meetings during 1995 and had numerous opportunities to talk with the RPC. As a result, the CAC recommends that the RPC:

- A. Focus on decisions-making items only.
- B. Including non-RPC stakeholders at the table for the issue at hand.
- C. Establish subcommittees.
- D. Find another way to do informational briefings.
- E. Publish a regional issues agenda.

While the CAC concluded its work on December 31, 1995, both Lisa Verner, Chair of the Regional Government Subcommittee, and I will be glad to meet with the RPC at its convenience in 1996 to discussion these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Lois North

cc: Members, King County Council
Members, Regional Policy Committee
The Honorable Gary Locke, King County Executive
The Honorable Norman B. Rice, Mayor City of Seattle
The Honorable Erselle Eade, President, Suburban Cities Association
Eileen Quigley, President, King County Municipal League
Karen Varill, President, League of Women Voters of Washington
Members, Consolidation Advisory Committee

KING COUNTY REGIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE -- SECOND YEAR PERFORMANCE REVIEW

A Report by the
King County Consolidation Advisory Committee
March 1996

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to summarize the Consolidation Advisory Committee's (CAC) observations and recommendations about the Metropolitan King County Council's Regional Policy Committee (RPC) as the RPC reaches its second anniversary. The CAC was created to advise the King County Executive and Metropolitan King County Council on implementation of the voter-approved consolidation of Metro and King County. One of the key elements of the consolidation was an amendment to the King County Charter that created three new multijurisdictional regional committees on transportation/transit, water quality, and regional policies. Each regional committee's membership was to include six King County Council members, three members from the City of Seattle, and three from the Suburban Cities (changed later to six members with one-half vote each). The transit and water quality committees essentially replaced similar committees of the former Metro Council. The RPC, however, was an entirely new creation. The RPC, as stated in the Charter amendment, has a very broad mandate to consider regional issues (other than transportation and water quality) that includes, but is not limited to, public health, human services, regional services financing policies, criminal justice and jails, and regional facilities siting.

The RPC has been the source of intense interest from a number of citizen groups. The Municipal League of King County closely followed the beginnings of the RPC and, in late 1994, issued a report on the RPC that reflected a difficult beginning.¹ The CAC also watched the rocky start. Some CAC members attended RPC meetings and workshops during 1994. During this period, the CAC generally consulted with the King County Council and specifically with the RPC for guidance in developing the CAC's work program. Metropolitan King County Councilmember Jane Hague, then chair of the RPC, asked the CAC's advice on community involvement in the RPC's work and suggested that the CAC might evolve into an on-going citizen advisory committee for the RPC. The CAC responded that it would be more effective to tailor community involvement to meet the needs of the specific issue under consideration rather than establishing a general purpose citizen advisory committee.² The CAC did not, however, specifically focus on the RPC until the CAC's second year beginning in 1995.

The CAC's consideration of the RPC began in earnest at the CAC's March 23, 1995 meeting. Metropolitan King County Councilmember Cynthia Sullivan, as Chair of the RPC, and Seattle

¹ Municipal League News, Municipal League of King County, August/September 1994.

² Letter dated June 22, 1994 from Consolidation Advisory Committee Chair Robert Hartley to Metropolitan King County Councilmember Jane Hague as chair of the RPC.

Metropolitan King County Councilmember Cynthia Sullivan, as Chair of the RPC, and Seattle City Councilmember Tom Weeks, as a member of the RPC, met with the full CAC. As a result of that meeting, the CAC sent a letter to the RPC which expressed concern about its focus on process and the failure to address substantive issues. The letter recommended that the RPC reconsider the report of the Select Committee on Regional Finances and Services appointed by Executive Gary Locke (also known as the "Dick Ford Committee"), and specifically the six critical regional issues identified by this committee. It also suggested that the RPC look to the SSB 5038 meeting³ for guidance on substantive regional issues. Finally, the letter repeated an earlier recommendation that the RPC include at the table decision-makers who are involved in the issue at hand even though they are not Charter-established committee members. In response to that letter, RPC Chair Cynthia Sullivan asked the CAC to monitor the RPC and to provide guidance on improving its performance. She also extended an invitation to Executive Gary Locke to serve as an ex-officio member of the RPC.⁴

EXPECTATIONS OF THE REGIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE

In order to evaluate performance of the RPC, the CAC reviewed what was expected of it. The expectations of the County and city elected officials who participated in the so-called Summit I and II processes during 1990-1992⁵ that lead to the consolidation proposal were that the regional committees would provide a countywide, intergovernmental planning and policy development process on regional matters. The RPC was intended to deal with emerging regional planning issues. The multijurisdictional membership on all three regional committees was intended to provide an opportunity for the cities to have a strong voice in regional policy development.⁶ The expectation of Municipal League of King County was for the regional committees to be "arenas for debate and regional decision making for elected officials representing the cities and the County."⁷ The Consolidation Advisory Committee expressed its expectation "that the RPC will exert strong leadership in developing a regional agenda for the County, cities, and citizenry that will clarify and realign regional and local duties and responsibilities."⁸

REGIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

At the beginning of 1995, the CAC divided itself into three subcommittees, one of which was the

³ Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5038 was passed by the Washington State Legislature in 1994. It required that county legislative authorities convene a meeting of the cities and special districts within the county to develop an approach to interlocal agreements for the provision of services, particularly urban services in unincorporated areas. King County convened its meeting on March 1, 1995. The participants concluded that while there are regional service issues to be resolved, there were already agreements or forums to address most of these. As of the writing of this report, there were no plans to continue the process outlined in SSB 5038.

⁴ Letter dated March 24, 1995 from Metropolitan King County Councilmember Cynthia Sullivan as Chair of the RPC to King County Executive Gary Locke.

⁵ A very brief summary of the summit process can be found in the Municipal League News, Municipal League of King County, August/September 1994.

⁶ Implementation of the RPCs--A Report to the Metropolitan King County Council, November 1993. A copy of this report can be found attached to King County Ordinance 1172 (1993).

⁷ Municipal League News, Municipal League of King County, August/September 1994.

⁸ Letter dated April 14, 1995 from Consolidation Advisory Committee Chair Lois North to Metropolitan King County Councilwoman Cynthia Sullivan as Chair of the RPC.

RPC. The RGS members established five performance measures that were used as the basis for observing the RPC meetings. The five measures are described further in the appendix: (1) attendance, (2) level of involvement of committee members, (3) regional content of matters under discussion, (4) substantive content of matters under discussion, and (5) progress in moving issues forward.

◆ **Attendance**

To be effective as a regional forum, all RPC members need to attend the meetings and participate in policy debates. Attendance varies noticeably among the members, with the Suburban City representatives generally having the best attendance. Metropolitan King County Council members need to guard against the demands of other Council duties encroaching on RPC meeting attendance when it is in session; coming and going from the room during the meetings is distracting and implies pre-judgment of issues.

◆ **Level of involvement of committee members**

The Suburban City representatives are attentive, but need to develop a regional perspective. They need to understand that there are problems that may not be as manifest in their jurisdictions as in highly urbanized areas, but affect them nonetheless. The Suburban City representatives need to understand that for regional issues, they cannot make an effective contribution to solutions by limiting their view to local city boundaries.

City of Seattle representatives need to be more attentive and need to adopt a regional perspective as well. Seattle representatives need to understand the Suburban City viewpoint in order help those representatives better understand how Seattle's issues affect them both as individual jurisdictions and as part of the region. Seattle cannot, acting alone, manage many of the major issues facing it.

Some King County Councilmembers have also displayed a disappointing degree of parochialism as reflected by geographic area of their district. They have failed to treat the City of Seattle and the Suburban Cities as full regional partners. King County will not be able to achieve true regional leadership without respect and partnership with the City of Seattle and Suburban Cities.

- ◆ **Regional content of matters under discussion**
- ◆ **Substantive content of matters under discussion**
- ◆ **Progress in moving issues forward**

The RPC has made considerable progress in all three areas. The committee has moved past a year-long debate over procedural matters and a tug-of-war between the newly created Metropolitan King County Council and the RPC. The committee is now meeting on a more regular basis and the agendas focus on regional issues of a substantive nature. A word of caution is needed, however. There now seems to be more on the agendas than can be reasonably addressed in a single meeting, especially if the subject matter is relatively new to

some committee members. The RPC either needs to limit its scope, meet more often, or divide into subgroups to address issues more effectively.

The RPC finds itself blessed with a wealth of regional issues. In part, this is because the RPC is being perceived as the multijurisdictional forum for all issues, except transit and water quality. Most of the County's regional programs seek input from Seattle, Suburban City and County elected officials. It is only natural that with its broad mission, these programs would look to the RPC as providing an opportunity to do so in a single forum.

The RPC has been assigned the Interlocal Forum function for solid waste issues, largely as a result of timing. Regional solid waste management policies are under discussion between the cities and the County and have been brought to the RPC. The Interlocal Forum established by interlocal agreement between the County and the cities was inactive. Rather than reactivate that group, its function was transferred by mutual agreement to the RPC. There is concern by some observers that the Interlocal Forum function will consume so much of the RPC's time that there will not be time for other issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Focus on decision-making items only. The RPC should give first priority to those regional issues which affect Seattle and the Suburban Cities, and where the County, as the responsible agency, will have to make a decision. Second priority should be given to developing a regional consensus on those issues which affect all jurisdictions, but which require jurisdictions to act individually.

B. Include non-RPC stakeholders at the table for the issue at hand. RPC membership is limited by Charter to County Councilmembers and city mayors or councilmembers. Many issues include key players who are not on the RPC for a variety of reasons--County and city Councilmembers who have a key role or interest in an issue but were not appointed to the RPC; the County Executive; elected or appointed officials from other jurisdictions such as special purpose districts; and private or public interest groups which have played a key role in the issue. It is important for the successful implementation of regional solutions that all those who will be affected be part of the discussions leading to the development of the solution.

C. Establish subcommittees. The breadth and depth of issues under consideration by the RPC make it difficult to get a full understanding in one or two meetings. At the moment, the RPC is involved in issues that are at the decision-making point of a much longer process. In the future, the RPC should be involved in shaping the policy agenda for a regional service or issue from the beginning. Depending on the nature of the service and issues, the degree of interest in the issue and the work that needs to be done, the RPC could decide to be more or less involved. For those issues where the RPC wants to be more involved, the subcommittee approach would allow this to occur without precluding an opportunity for the RPC as a whole to adequately address other issues at the same time. The easiest way to do this would be to create subcommittees comprised of members drawn from the RPC. However, this would not address

the need to include non-RPC stakeholders at the RPC table. Two alternatives are suggested:

- Alt. #1. Create subcommittees from RPC members and add outside stakeholders as needed. Subcommittees could be ad hoc or standing depending on the issue and need.
- Alt. #2. Create subcommittees consisting of a RPC-member chair with the remaining members appointed from the RPC membership, other County and city elected officials, and other stakeholders as appropriate. (For those who have followed King County since the adoption of the home rule charter, the model for this approach is the Policy Development Commission.)

D. Find another way to do informational briefings. Obtaining input and educating decision-makers about the issues is important for successful, high quality outcomes. While some of this can and should occur at the RPC, this is not the only opportunity. The RPC should consider whether it is more important to develop a few highly interested elected officials who can function as issue resources/leaders for others or to ensure that every elected official be informed on the issues. The strategy should fit the subject matter, issue and decision making objective. There are a number of alternative approaches that are suggested for consideration:

- Alt. #1: Hold informational briefings as monthly working sessions in between monthly action meetings.
- Alt. #2: Initiate briefings in individual cities or hold sub-area briefings (in the evening since most suburban elected officials are employed during the day) preferably with an RPC member as "sponsor" to bring comments back to RPC.
- Alt. #3: Use existing groups such as the Suburban Cities Association, Seattle City Council committees, or the Human Services Roundtable for briefings.
- Alt. #4: Create ad hoc advisory groups of interested elected officials to develop expertise among jurisdictions on an issue.

E. Publish a Regional Issues Agenda. One of the problems that the RPC faces (as do all elected officials and organizations following local government issues) is trying to keep track of the status of regional issues. Too often, issues seem to sneak up, demanding attention and decisions with limited response time. Multiple issues also frequently conflict with or impact each other. The RPC needs to know what issues are emerging so that it can develop an effective work program.

The RPC could address this information gap and perform a great public service by publishing an agenda of regional issues at least biannually. This should take the form of a simple, easy to use reference document listing the issues, who is responsible or has assumed responsibility for the issue, including non-government agencies and groups (there are often multiple players), contact

names, a one-paragraph summary of the issue, the current status of the issue, and a time frame for resolution. This can be done by King County or contracted out to groups such as King County Municipal League or Seattle-King County Leagues of Women Voters, private consultants, or even newspapers. There should also be wide spread distribution of the agenda.

CONCLUSION

The Consolidation Advisory Committee finds that the RPC has made some progress towards creating an effective forum for King County and the cities in King County to address regional issues of mutual concern. While those watching the RPC's development have generally common expectations of what the RPC is to be, the RPC is hampered by inconsistent views of how those expectations are to be met. The broad mission provides the RPC with the flexibility to achieve these expectations, but the broadness has made it difficult for the RPC to focus its efforts.

The RPC should be viewed, in part, as an experiment. The County Council and the members of the RPC needs to learn how to make the regional committee process work as intended. The Consolidation Advisory Committee has offered some recommendations for how this can be done. County Council members must now make a commitment to support the regional committee process as an important and integral part of the Council's operations. The representatives from the City of Seattle and the Suburban Cities must develop a regional perspective within which individual city concerns can be expressed. Finally, it will be up to those individuals, groups and jurisdictions that helped forge the regional committees as part of the consolidation proposal to monitor their performance and hold the County and the cities accountable for the RPC's success.

**REGIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE (RPC) MONITORING GUIDELINES
FOR
CONSOLIDATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) OBSERVERS**

- ◆ The appropriate participants are involved in the discussion and in an appropriate manner.

Values. Everyone is treated fairly; opinions respected; no one threatens to take their ball and bat and go home; others who have a decision-making role in the issue being addressed are at the table and have a role in the RPC as appropriate.

-- Addresses Municipal League's identification of the "political problem" and concern that the RPC meet the Summit's intent that power be shared among the County, Seattle and suburban cities at the RPC table.

-- Addresses the CAC's concerns that the RPC table be expanded as is appropriate to include key decision-makers for the issues at hand.

- ◆ Matters discussed were regional in nature.

Values: The RPC members avoid talking about issues from a parochial point of view and take a regional perspective instead.

-- Addresses Municipal League concern about too much time spent on working out parochial and cultural political differences and not enough on real issues.

-- Addresses CAC concern that the RPC has spent too much time on parochial concerns and not taken a regional perspective.

- ◆ Matters discussed at the meeting are substantive in nature.

Values: The RPC members avoid becoming embroiled in procedural issues. There is no delay or wasted time spent on procedural ambiguities.

-- The Municipal League identified procedural problems as one of the major reason for the RPC's poor performance.

-- Addresses both Municipal League and CAC concerns about the lack of substantive work.

- ◆ Progress is made in moving the issues forward.

Values: The RPC accomplish something in the meeting; take at least a small step forward.

-- Addresses both Municipal League and CAC concerns about lack of forward progress.

ATTACHMENT B

Consolidation Advisory Committee Members

Lois North, Chair
Allen Apodaca
Marilyn Bierman
Virginia DeForest
Paul Griffin
Robert Hartley
John House
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Dorcen Marchione
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Regional Government Subcommittee

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